

Chore Monkeys

by

Patrick Gabridge

Patrick Gabridge
14 Farragut Avenue
Medford, MA 02155
617-959-1437
Pat@gabridge.com
Www.gabridge.com
Copyright Patrick Gabridge
2014

Chore Monkeys**CHARACTERS**

Minimum required 3 (?) men, 3 women. (Can use up to 6 women, if you skip doubling.)

DANTE WILLIAMS A black man, 20s. Extremely handy--can put together IKEA furniture in a flash. Wants to be independent and stay independent. Has a learning disability that makes reading very difficult. Always hungry. Very much does not want to be arrested .

PETER MECKLENBERG White guy, 20s. An old high school classmate of Dante's. Extremely bright, witty, and completely unmotivated--lives with his divorced parents, smokes a lot of pot, watches a lot porn, plays a lot of video games. Business partner with Dante.

ABBY White woman, 30s/40s, recent arrival to this town.

BECKY White woman, 40s/50s, butch, married to Cheri. A biologist by trade. Protective of her wife and suspicious of men and the world.

CHERI White woman, 30s, pretty, someone who finds the good in people. Married to Becky.

DIANE White woman, 30s/40s. (Can double with Abby.) A chocolatier operating out of her home.

ELIZABETH White woman, 40s. (Can double with Becky.) Undergoing chemotherapy, but her prognosis is poor.

FRANCES White woman, 30s. (Can double with Cheri). Uncomfortable having strange men in her home, especially strange black men.

ZANDER White man, 30s+. Dressed for business. (Non-speaking role.)

SETTING

Living rooms and bedrooms of various apartments across a large city. (Boston.)

Though each scene in this play is in a different living room, it's important to avoid major scene changes--the major elements should remain the same (couch, chair, table, etc.). Perhaps one or two specific items can show that this is a different place--a picture, or a cube of an end table that can be rotated. (Please avoid moving furniture.)

If Dante and Peter succeed in assembling furniture in any given scene, it might start to accumulate scene to scene. (I'm not sure yet.)

There is a pile of IKEA boxes in the room. Let's consider having the pile be the pile for the entire show--and in every scene it just gets smaller. That way there's no need for stagehands/actors to haul new boxes on stage between scenes, and the pile gives us a sense of progression of the action.

Changes between the scenes should be VERY fast, so we don't want too much set dressing for each client.

TIME

Now.

SCENE 1: BORGSJO

(The living room of an apartment. A pile of IKEA boxes sit on the floor near the couch. A pile of moving boxes is nearby. Clearly the apartment has not yet been completely moved in and unpacked.)

(At rise: The doorbell RINGS. Abby, a white woman in her 30s/40s enters and answers the door. Two men stand in the hall, both in their 20s--Peter, who is white, and Dante, who is black. Both wear blue polo shirts with the logo "Chore Monkey" embroidered on the breast pocket. Peter's left arm is in a sling. He holds a clipboard in his right hand.)

ABBY

Hi. You must be Peter. Oh. And who is this?

PETER

Hi, Abby. This is Dante. He's going to be helping me today. Is that all right? He's certified with Chore Monkey, just like I am.

ABBY

Sure. That's fine. I just wasn't expecting.

PETER

I hurt my shoulder on a job, so I need an extra pair of hands. I promise that he's just as skilled as I am.

ABBY

I just wasn't counting on paying two people.

PETER

Don't worry. You still pay the original fee that you signed up for online. We're not trying to double-dip, but I can't afford to let a bum shoulder keep me from working. Still need to buy groceries, you know?

ABBY

I can see how that would be a problem.

(A beat.)

PETER

So. Can we come in?

ABBY

Of course. Sorry.

(She leads them into the apartment. Dante carries a case for a power drill, a large tool box, and a tackle box.)

ABBY

With the move, my brain isn't firing on all cylinders.

PETER

Part of our job is to take away some of your stress.

ABBY

It takes me forever to put IKEA stuff together. I start my new job tomorrow, and I need to stop living in boxes.

PETER

We can help move boxes, too.

ABBY

That would be awesome. The movers just dumped them all in one big pile.

PETER

We'll assemble the bookcases first. Where do you want them?

ABBY

How about over here?

(While Peter chats with Abby, Dante gets on his knees and whips out a box cutter and opens the first IKEA box. It's clear he's done this many times before. He glances at the instructions, then separates the hardware and fasteners and counts them.)

PETER

Let me go over the printout while Dante gets started. You want us to assemble two IKEA Borgsjo book cases, and one IKEA Hemnes cabinet. The minimum charge is for one hour, our rate is \$50/hour, and we're estimating 90 minutes, including clean up. We can even haul away the empty boxes. If that sounds good, just sign here.

(Abby signs the forms.)

ABBY

Can I get you something? I haven't had time to shop, but I've got some cheese and crackers.

PETER

No, thanks we're fine.

DANTE

I'm hungry.

ABBY

Oh. Okay. Cheese and crackers all right?

DANTE

Please.

ABBY

I'll be right back.

(She exits.)

DANTE

She's missing a cam lock nut.

(Peter takes a small metal piece out of the tackle box and tosses it to Dante.)

(Dante assembles the bookcase. He uses a cordless drill and rubber mallet and knows exactly what he's doing.)

PETER

We just had lunch.

DANTE

She asked.

PETER

It's not professional.

DANTE

It's polite.

PETER

The guilt of paying one rate for two people will now be alleviated by the fact that she's giving you cheese and crackers. Thus shrinking our tip.

DANTE

I'm hungry.

PETER

Shocker.

DANTE

Maybe if you did some work, you'd be hungry, too.

PETER

Every e-mail and text that gets us a new assignment is me working.

DANTE

My kind of work makes me hungry.

PETER

Sleeping makes you hungry. Breathing makes you hungry.

DANTE

True.

PETER

I can not think of a single moment, from the ninth grade until now, when you have not been hungry.

(Dante already has the frame of one of the bookcases together.)

(Abby enters with a plate of cheese and crackers and two cans of Coke.)

ABBY

You guys are fast.

PETER

Lots of practice.

ABBY

Here's the snacks.

PETER

Thanks. Do you want us to load the bookcases from this pile of boxes?

ABBY

Sure. The boxes should be marked, except for where I got in a rush at the end. Moving is like a tidal wave, it sneaks up on you and then all of a sudden the water's over your head. (beat) I have to go make a call--I'll be in the bedroom if you need anything.

(She turns to go but stops.)

ABBY

Can I ask you something?

PETER

Shoot.

ABBY

Does it smell like cat in here? I noticed it when I first moved in, but now I'm worried that I'm just not noticing.

DANTE

Stinks pretty bad.

ABBY

Damn.

PETER

It's not that bad. You can buy products that will absorb the odor. If that doesn't work, you might need to replace the floor.

ABBY

Realtors are so scummy. They lit a scented candle during the walk through, and I was coming from out of town, so I was in a rush.

PETER

Lots of open windows and fresh air for a while. It'll

be fine.

ABBY

Thanks.

(Abby exits.)

(Dante devours the snacks and drinks the Coke.)

PETER

"Stinks pretty bad?" Are you fucking kidding me?

DANTE

She asked. My grandmother's place smelled like this. She had six cats. Terrible.

PETER

Do not tell her that her new condo smells like an old cat lady's apartment.

DANTE

She wasn't an old cat lady, she was my grandmother.

PETER

If a client's house stinks, we might want to downplay that a little.

DANTE

Better that she know.

(Dante holds out the plate with a last remaining piece of cheese and a cracker.)

DANTE

Want some?

PETER

No thanks.

(Dante finishes it and returns to the bookcase.)

PETER

What do you think of her?

DANTE

Seems nice enough.

PETER

She's cute. Friendly. Would you do her?

DANTE

She's old.

PETER

The proper term is "experienced." That's how I like my women.

DANTE

Please.

PETER

I think she's kind of into me. I felt a spark.

DANTE

Yeah?

PETER

A frisson in the air.

DANTE

What about Tara?

PETER

What about her?

DANTE

She might not like you making sparks with Abby.

PETER

She wouldn't know, dipwad. Maybe Abby will come back and say, "Excuse me, Peter, but I have a project for you in the bedroom."

DANTE

You watch too much porn.

PETER

I watch exactly the right amount of porn. It might happen, if there weren't two of us. Though, I suppose she could come looking for a three-way.

DANTE

No, thanks.

PETER

I agree. Only with two women.

DANTE

Plus you don't want to be compared.

PETER

I'd measure up just fine.

DANTE

Oh, please, white boy.

PETER

I refuse to engage in racial stereotyping.

DANTE

There's a tape measure in the tool box.

PETER

Keep it in your pants, Dante.

(Dante has finished the first bookcase.)

DANTE

Help me put this up.

(They lift the bookcase. With Peter using only one hand it's awkward to move it.)

DANTE

Jesus, Pete. Come on.

(Peter looks around and then removes his left hand from the sling and uses both arms to help move the bookcase.)

Peter quickly slides his arm back into the sling. Dante starts on the second bookcase.

(Peter opens a box and starts putting the books on the shelf.)

PETER

Eat Pray Love. Poisonwood Bible. She's Come Undone.
Does she read anything not pre-approved by Oprah?

DANTE

Sounds smart.

PETER

Ah, *The Bluest Eye*. Anyone who likes Toni Morrison can be a friend of mine.

DANTE

You and the books.

(Abby enters with the phone at her ear.)

ABBY

I'm on hold. These people are making me crazy.

PETER

I love your taste in books.

(Abby smiles, then reacts to the phone.)

ABBY

Yes, I'm still here. No. No, it's not working. This is the third time I've called.

(Abby exits, annoyed.)

PETER

So, Dante. We've been doing this a while now.

DANTE

Let's not fuck it up.

PETER

Maybe it's time to reconsider the split of the take.

DANTE

I been thinking the same thing.

PETER

Sixty-forty isn't fair. I should get half.

DANTE

What?

PETER

You act like you're doing all the work--

DANTE

Because I do all the work.

(Peter finishes the first box of books
and starts on another.)

PETER

You can't ignore my part. Communication with the client
is essential.

DANTE

I can text and e-mail.

PETER

We each have our strengths. Spelling and grammar are
not yours.

DANTE

Yours is sitting on your ass while I assemble
furniture.

PETER

Our busy schedule and full wallets exist because of me.

DANTE

It ain't half of the work.

PETER

I know you saw the look Abby gave you when she opened
the door. She has no fucking idea that she gave you
that look. Abby is a very nice woman. Highly educated.
Possibly liberal. But she still gave you that look.

DANTE

Shut up.

PETER

Which is why you came to me in the first place.

DANTE

But half? Fuck you. You live with your mom. Your dad gives you money.

PETER

I have expenses.

DANTE

Price of weed going up?

PETER

As a matter of fact it is. Not that you ever appreciate my generosity when I share.

DANTE

Fucking Chore Monkey already takes twenty-five percent from every job. If you take half of what's left, I get squeezed.

PETER

You still end up making twenty dollars an hour. Beats the hell out of pouring coffee at Starbucks.

DANTE

My dad says I should cut you back to thirty percent.

PETER

You talked to your dad about this?

DANTE

To show him that I don't need his help.

PETER

He just doesn't like me.

DANTE

He doesn't like most people.

PETER

We don't need him poking around in our business. Four hundred jobs, Dante. By next week, I'll have booked us four hundred jobs.

DANTE

You think I can't find another lazy ass white boy willing to take my money?

PETER

No. For this venture, you require a partner who is not fully engaged in the rat race. Fortunately, I am willing and able to help you procure employment in a batshit crazy world--by using my interpersonal skills and mild obfuscation.

DANTE

Obfuscation? Do you have to talk like that?

PETER

A perfect verbal SAT score should be useful for something.

DANTE

I ain't giving you half.

PETER

We can raise our rates to \$60/hour. You'd get a raise.

DANTE

You're the one trying to get a raise.

(Peter opens another box.)

PETER

Oh shit. She definitely should have labeled this box.

(Peter brings out a small vibrator. It starts to buzz.)

DANTE

Turn it off.

PETER

I don't even know how I turned it on

DANTE

She's going to come back.

PETER

Oooh. It tingles.

DANTE

Hurry.

PETER

I'm trying.

(Abby enters, still on the phone. Peter shoves the vibrator into his pocket. We can still hear a faint buzzing noise. Dante starts his drill, to cover the sound of the buzzing coming from Peter's pocket. Peter grabs an empty book box and holds it in front of him.)

ABBY

(*on phone*) Okay. Thanks. (*hangs up*) Jeez, it's like they intentionally want to give you a stroke. Everything going smoothly?

PETER

Already have books going into the first bookcase.

ABBY

Excellent. I should probably help .

PETER

No! No. You're fine. This is your chance to make those calls you've been putting off. Procrastination is a disease, Abby. We have to fight it.

ABBY

You're right. Keep up the good work. I'll be back.

(She dials her phone and exits.)

(Peter lowers the box. Dante turns off the drill. The buzzing is still coming from Peter's pants.)

PETER

I should have one of these in my pocket all the time.

DANTE

Turn. It. Off.

(Peter fiddles in his pocket and the buzzing stops.)

DANTE

You know we're not in high school anymore, right?

PETER

I'm keeping it. As a souvenir.

DANTE

You gotta quit taking souvenirs, man.

PETER

But it's so tiny. She won't even miss it.

(Peter grabs a roll of packing tape from the tool box and seals the box.)

PETER

Plus the box is clearly sealed. If something is missing, it was the movers who swiped it. Not us.

(Peter slides the box back into the pile and opens a box of books and starts adding them to the shelves.)

DANTE

Put it back.

PETER

It is the perfect tip. In so many ways.

DANTE

Seriously.

PETER

Just make the bookcase.

(Dante returns to work .)

DANTE

Don't fuck this up for me.

PETER

I won't.

DANTE

I like this job. It is not easy to find work. I have rent to pay. I have truck payments. I have to eat.

PETER

Chill, man.

DANTE

Pull this kind of shit and you want half.

PETER

It was just a thought.

DANTE

Oh, I'm thinking.

PETER

We have another at two o'clock. After that, I'll buy you pizza. All you can eat.

DANTE

You'll be sorry. And we can raise the rate, but not the cut.

PETER

Fine.

(They get back to work.)

(End of scene.)

SCENE 2 LIATORP

(a few days later)

(Another living room. Similar to previous one, but no moving boxes, and messier, with stacks of papers and half of a chocolate cake on top of one of the piles.)

(The doorbell rings.)

(Becky enters--she's in her 40s, butch, white, dressed professionally but with only one shoe.)

BECKY

(calling to someone offstage) Are you expecting someone? Have you seen my shoe?

(The doorbell rings again.)

BECKY

Cheri? Jesus.

(Becky opens the door. Peter and Dante are waiting with their tools. Peter's arm is in the sling, they wear their usual polo shirts, etc.)

BECKY

Who are you?

PETER

Hi. Are you Cheri? I'm Peter, from Chore Monkey.

BECKY

Cheri! (to the guys) Hold on.

(Cheri enters--30s, very pretty, hip, white.)

CHERI

Oh, hi. You must be Peter.

BECKY

I told you I'd do it.

CHERI

Those boxes have been sitting there for months.

BECKY

I can handle a screwdriver.

CHERI

I'm not questioning your handiness, just your availability.

BECKY

It takes two of them to assemble a desk and a coffee table?

PETER

I hurt my shoulder. This is Dante. He's here to--

BECKY

(to Cheri)
I'll do it when I get back.

CHERI

Too late. They're here. (to the guys) Come on in. Sorry about this. You're just threatening her butchiness.

BECKY

I'm just saying that I am capable. Hell, you are capable, if you just. Ah, shit. The cab will be here any minute. Have you seen my shoe?

CHERI

Look under the bed.

(Becky exits to look for her shoe.)

CHERI

The boxes are over here.

(She leads them to the boxes.)

CHERI

I'm hoping new furniture will help us get organized.

(Becky wheels a suitcase over to the door. She still wears only one shoe.)

BECKY

How am I supposed to talk to five hundred microbiologists wearing only one shoe?

CHERI

Did you try the closet?

BECKY

Of course.

CHERI

All the way in? You throw them in the back, and they multiply, like one of your experiments gone berserk.

BECKY

It can't be in there.

CHERI

Did you get on your hands and knees and look?

BECKY

I don't think it's there.

CHERI

Jesus, Becky. (*to the guys*) Go ahead and get started, I'll be right back.

PETER

Can I get a signature from you acknowledging our rate of \$60/hour, for a minimum of--

CHERI

Fine. Whatever.

(Cheri signs and exits with Becky.)

(Dante has already begun unpacking the first box.)

PETER

That one is hot.

DANTE

She plays for a different team, man.

PETER

That's my dream. A little girl-on-girl action, and then Peter arrives.

DANTE

I don't think the other one will invite you to the party.

PETER

Once my magic wand casts its spell, no woman can resist. Even the saphically inclined.

DANTE

Where do you get this shit?

PETER

Like you haven't ever thought it?

DANTE

Thinking and talking are different.

PETER

For most people, that is true. But for some of us fortunate few, thinking and speaking co-exist in a mellifluous torrent of brilliance.

DANTE

You're like a walking warning sign against test prep.

PETER

Au contraire. I am a fully embodied advertisement for Kaplan--"Not only do we boost your scores, but your vocabulary will impress and mystify your friends and family."

DANTE

You're a mystery all right.

(Dante begins assembling the desk.)

(Peter casually pokes around the piles, opens a drawer of a file cabinet.)

DANTE

Quit it.

PETER

Just exploring. (*to himself as he looks*) Boring. Boring. Crap. Junk. Ooh, looky here.

(Takes a small bong out of a drawer.)

PETER

Maybe Ms. Bossypants needs a little help getting unwound. This might be just the ticket to ease her fear of public speaking, or of flying. A remedy to suit many ills.

DANTE

Shouldn't you be making us appointments or something?

PETER

Fine. Slave driver.

(Peter puts the bong back and gets out his smart phone.)

(Cheri enters.)

CHERI

I saw in your profile that you do repairs, too. Do you ever work on toilets?

PETER

What seems to be the problem?

CHERI

It just keeps running.

PETER

I can take a quick look.

(Cheri and Peter exit.)

(Becky enters, now wearing two shoes. She takes a long suspicious look at Dante. Dante gives her a half smile and

keeps working.)

(Becky pulls some papers out of a pile, then moves the chocolate cake farther away from Dante. Looks skeptically at Dante again.)

BECKY

Cheri! Cheri?

(Becky exits.)

(Peter enters.)

DANTE

What's the story?

PETER

The thing is shot.

DANTE

The thing?

PETER

The thing that fills the tank.

DANTE

The fill valve? Jesus, you know every useless word in the dictionary, but you can't remember "fill valve."

PETER

Floccinaucinihilipilification.

DANTE

What?

PETER

The act of estimating something to be worthless. One of the longest and most useless words in the dictionary.

DANTE

Does it have your picture next to it?

PETER

Ha! Very good. Fuck you. I can go get a fill valve.

DANTE

I keep one in the truck, so we don't have to fuck around at the hardware store. Let's do it and get out.

PETER

I'm not one for the wet work.

DANTE

You're not one for any work.

PETER

Just install it when you're done with the desk. I was thinking that Cheri and I might sample my latest acquisition and see what happens.

(He produces a ziploc of weed from his pocket.)

DANTE
You're walking around with that shit?

PETER
Medical use. For my shoulder.

DANTE
If we get stopped, you can NOT have that in my truck.

PETER
Relax. I thought we might want to smoke a little after work. Unwind after a hard day. I brought it to share.

DANTE
Well. That's something, I guess.

PETER
No, no. I'm a stupid, worthless slacker, and you are a hard-working manly man.

(Peter puts the bag back in his pocket.)

DANTE
Even manly men need to relax a little. We can hang. I will buy the burgers.

(Becky enters, followed closely by Cheri.)

CHERI
Becky. Come on. The cab.

BECKY
(to Peter) How's the shoulder, Peter?

CHERI
(to Becky) Let it go.

PETER
Much better. Thanks for asking.

BECKY
(to Cheri) I am not comfortable leaving you here with these two.

CHERI
Becky.

BECKY
Something doesn't smell right.

PETER

We're just putting your furniture together, Ma'am.

BECKY

Don't "ma'am" me.

PETER

And we'll fix your toilet, too. I've been on hundreds of jobs.

BECKY

I was just re-reading your profile on Cheri's computer. I should be preparing for my trip, but instead I'm reading online reviews of our handyman.

PETER

I don't understand.

BECKY

People seem to like you, Peter. So many well-wishers. "Thanks for the work, Peter. Hope your shoulder feels better soon." "Peter is a good worker, and with a little help, because of his bum shoulder, he had our furniture assembled in no time."

PETER

People are nice.

BECKY

People are sheep. Those comments were from a year ago. I looked up Mr. Dante's profile, and there are only a handful of jobs, and no mention of you. But he's in yours, obliquely.

CHERI

Just let them assemble the desk.

BECKY

They're lying, and I want to know why. (to Peter) I haven't seen you touch a tool yet. Why are you here?

PETER

I told you.

BECKY

Bullshit. Do I need to call Chore Monkey and ask what the fuck is going on?

(A cab honks from outside.)

CHERI

The cab is here. I'm fine. They're doing their work. Go to Phoenix.

BECKY

I'm not leaving you with them until I get answers.

CHERI

I am not a delicate flower.

PETER

I hurt my shoulder. Dante is helping me.

BECKY

Wrong. Try again.

DANTE

He's here because he's white.

PETER

No, I'm here because--

DANTE

Fuck it. (*deep breath. To Becky.*) We have to put a photo in our profile. A lot of people won't have a black guy in their house, not even to assemble IKEA shit.

BECKY

We wouldn't care.

DANTE

Most folks aren't so special.

CHERI

We're not like that.

PETER

I do more than just be white.

DANTE

I'm good at this. And he's good at being white. It gets us jobs.

BECKY

I don't want liars working in my house.

CHERI

Are you even listening?

(The cab honks again.)

BECKY

This whole thing depends on trust.

CHERI

They're just assembling furniture.

BECKY

They're in our home. And they've been lying to us. And to lots of other people.

PETER

We're completely certified.

BECKY

Certified? By whom? That's total bullshit. Have you ever met your supervisor?

PETER

We're all independent contractors.

BECKY

Do they know you play this little game?

PETER

It's not a game.

BECKY

It's dishonest.

CHERI

They have an explanation.

BECKY

Which you buy completely, of course.

DANTE

This is bullshit.

BECKY

Excuse me?

DANTE

Why did you go back and read that profile?

BECKY

I was suspicious.

DANTE

You wouldn't have given it a second thought if I was white.

BECKY

Are you accusing me? Don't you dare. You don't know anything about me.

DANTE

Would you have hired me if you saw my picture?

CHERI

I would have.

DANTE

Maybe. But not her.

(The horn honks again.)

BECKY

You've got a lot of nerve.

DANTE

If I did, I wouldn't need Pete. You're her protection, he's mine. My witness and my key.

PETER

(to Becky) None of us are as good as we want to be.

BECKY

I know what prejudice feels like.

DANTE

Yeah. Shitty.

BECKY

You can not accuse me of this. I haven't done anything wrong. I am not like that. Tell them, Cheri.

CHERI

You're a warrior. A mensch. A beacon. And your cab is waiting. There is a lot of misunderstanding going on here. But there is no danger. There are people who want to work and who have been barred from the door and found a way in. I am not afraid, and, frankly, I am insulted that you will not let me handle this situation on my own.

BECKY

I don't like it.

CHERI

I'm sure they don't like you, either.

(The cab honks again.)

CHERI

Come on, before the cab leaves. (to the boys) I'll be back.

(Cheri and Becky exit.)

(The guys look at each other in silence.)

PETER

Wow. Just call them out. That's one strategy.

DANTE

Yeah.

PETER

I mean, check and mate. Where the hell did you come from?

DANTE

Every fucking time, it's something. She'll still rat us out to Chore Monkey.

PETER

Not after your fancy footwork. Well played, sir.

(Dante starts back to work on the desk,
but stops.)

I'm hungry. DANTE

Revelation. PETER

Give me that cake. DANTE

(Peter hands Dante the chocolate cake.
Dante starts to eat it.)

Are you sure we should? PETER

Fuck 'em. DANTE

(Together they devour all of the cake.
Their hunger, especially Dante's, is
messy and raw.)

Well. PETER

Not bad. DANTE

Paragons of virtue. PETER

Trustworthy as shit. DANTE

(Peter goes into the drawer and takes
out the bong. And a fancy silver
cigarette lighter. He flicks it on and
off playfully.)

Not now. DANTE

For later. PETER

Don't. DANTE

People do not call the cops and say, "Oh, officer, the
furniture guys stole my bong." PETER

DANTE
No souvenirs.

(Peter puts the bong and the lighter in
the toolbox.)

PETER
Not a souvenir. Plunder. Righteous plunder. (*in a pirate
voice*) We are the IKEA pirates, sailing off the shoals
of mediocrity, in a ship made of compressed sawdust and
melamine.

DANTE
You're fucking crazy.

PETER
Hej, vi är här för att montera dina möbler!

DANTE
What?

PETER
Swedish. "Hello, we are here to assemble your
furniture!" Ancient Viking battle cry.

DANTE
Why would you know that?

PETER
I was teaching myself useful Swedish phrases the other
night.

DANTE
How is it that you have a girlfriend and I don't?

PETER
We're even on that score now. Tara and I didn't work
out.

DANTE
Maybe if you spent less time learning Swedish and
playing Grand Theft Auto.

PETER
Too soon, man. Too soon.

DANTE
Sorry.

(Dante gets back to work on the desk.)

DANTE
Can you start on that toilet?

PETER
Me? Oh, sorry, I'm busy being white. It takes all my
time.

DANTE

Did I hurt your feelings? Do you want me to hold your hand?

PETER

Fuck you. What I do is useful, and is more than just my skin color.

DANTE

I fucking pay you.

PETER

Just say it.

DANTE

What?

PETER

I am more than just a white guy.

DANTE

You are.

PETER

Say it.

DANTE

You are more than just a white guy.

PETER

And?

DANTE

And you are helpful and perform actual work. Kind of.

PETER

I feel much better now.

DANTE

Go start the toilet.

(Cheri enters.)

PETER

You convinced her.

CHERI

I'm sorry that she got so. She gets freaked out by public speaking, so she's not herself.

DANTE

Sure.

CHERI

You're wrong about her. She has been discriminated against all her life. Lost jobs, been refused apartments. So for you to accuse her. You're entitled

to feel however you want about her, but it wasn't what you think.

PETER

We don't want any hard feelings, Cheri.

CHERI

Of course not.

PETER

We just want to do the job.

CHERI

She's going to feel bad about this. And I want to be able to tell her that it's okay. I want to make sure you understand. We would not avoid hiring you because you're black. It might even make us more likely to hire you, all things being equal.

DANTE

All things being equal?

CHERI

Like, you know, comparable experience, reviews. If it was between your profile and someone white, and it looked like you were about the same, then we'd go with someone like you.

DANTE

Black.

CHERI

Right.

DANTE

What if it was a woman?

CHERI

We'd hire her in a heartbeat.

DANTE

And she'd need a profile just as good as the white boys'?

CHERI

I guess so.

DANTE

You might not cut her a little slack? Hard to build her profile if no one will hire her. Hard to get good reviews, if they expect everything she does to be wrong.

CHERI

We would understand that.

DANTE

I bet you would.

PETER

Look, we're not trying to make you feel bad. Are we, Dante?

DANTE

Nah.

PETER

We just want to put your furniture together, and to know you're not going to badmouth us in your review, or call Chore Monkey.

CHERI

I'm not.

PETER

You didn't make people the way they are. But you know what it's like, just as much as Becky. People don't see it, because you look so... you know. Pretty. People assume the world falls down at your feet. But that's not always the case. It's not as tough for you as it is for Becky. She probably reminds you about that.

CHERI

She might.

PETER

You know what it's like to struggle, but you can't talk to her about it. It's like me hanging with Dante. What right do I have to complain to him? But that doesn't mean that I don't have my own struggles.

CHERI

Absolutely.

PETER

It's complicated. And I get it.

CHERI

I'm glad. Look, do you want something to--

(She notices the cake is gone.)

CHERI

Do you want something to drink? To wash down that cake.

PETER

Sorry. Couldn't help myself.

CHERI

Me neither. I had been trying not to eat the whole thing myself. Guess you did me a favor.

PETER

No, it was rude and stupid. Seriously, I'm very sorry.

SCENE 3 KALLAX

(A week or so later.)

(Another living room. Much neater than previous. Pile of IKEA boxes on the floor. Small gift bags of chocolates cover the table.)

(The doorbell rings.)

(Diane enters--she's in her 30s, white, a bit sweaty, in a way that's quite attractive, wearing a chocolate-stained apron.)

(She opens the door to reveal Peter, his arm in a sling, holding a cloth bag with tools spilling out.)

DIANE

Hi. You must be Peter.

PETER

Hi, Diane. Nice to meet you.

DIANE

Are you hurt?

PETER

Me? Well, I, uh, hurt my shoulder. But I'm hoping that a friend of mine, Dante, another certified Chore Monkey, will be here any minute to help me out.

DIANE

Okay.

PETER

Don't worry, he's just as skilled as I am. And we won't charge any more for the two people.

DIANE

Should we just reschedule?

PETER

No, no. I'm sure he'll be here. No matter what, we'll find a way to get your job done.

DIANE

Okay. Great. Come on in.

PETER

What are you cooking? Smells like dessert.

DIANE

Chocolates. I'm a chocolatier. Or at least, I'm trying

to be. Right now I'm making a batch of dark chocolate dipped caramels with sea salt.

PETER

Smells like heaven.

DIANE

Thanks. I've got so many orders that I'm running out of room. This new cabinet should help.

PETER

Let me go over the printout with you while while I wait for Dante. You want us to assemble a Kallax IKEA shelf unit. The minimum charge is for one hour, our rate is \$60/hour, and we're estimating two hours of work time, including clean up. We can even haul away the empty boxes. If that sounds good, I need you to sign here.

(Sound of a timer going off in the kitchen. Diane quickly signs the forms.)

DIANE

Gotta run.

(She exits to the kitchen. The beeping stops.)

(Peter looks at the pile of IKEA boxes. Dumps out his bag that has a ragtag collection of screwdrivers, a hammer, and a beat up cordless drill. He takes out his cell phone and dials. Gets Dante's voice mail.)

PETER

Dante. This is Peter. Where the fuck are you? I'm at the job. Call me. And get your ass over here.

(Peter ends the call. Tries texting.)

(Paces nervously. Looks at his phone. Nothing.)

PETER

Fuuuuck. Come on, come on, come on. Dante. Where are you?

(He lines up his tools in some orderly fashion. Looks at the IKEA boxes. Takes out his phone again and texts angrily. Dials again.)

PETER

It's me. 190 Dartmouth, unit 6. You should have been here ten minutes ago. Where the fuck are you?

(Ends the call.)

Asshole.

PETER

(Stares at the boxes warily.)

(Diane enters, carrying a small dish.)

DIANE
No luck with your friend?

PETER
He's usually very dependable. Maybe his phone died. Or he was in a horrible crippling accident.

DIANE
I hope not.

PETER
I'm sure he's fine. But I can do it, even if he doesn't get here.

DIANE
With your shoulder?

PETER
It's mostly healed. The sling is more of a precaution. I can do it. If I feel like I'm moving too slow, I'll charge you for less time. Okay?

DIANE
That seems fair.

(He removes his arm from the sling and stretches a little, preparing for battle.)

DIANE
Want to try a chocolate?

(She offers the dish. He eats one.)

PETER
Wow. Wow. And I am not just saying that. That is pure ambrosia, food of the Gods.

DIANE
I just need everyone to react like that.

PETER
That is not just a piece of chocolate, that is a work of art.

DIANE
Thanks.

(Sound of beeping from the kitchen.)

DIANE
Gotta keep the batches rolling.

PETER
I'm going to start without him.

DIANE
Don't hurt yourself.

(She exits.)

(Peter eats another chocolate, takes a deep breath, and opens a large IKEA box. He finds the instruction booklet and looks it over.)

PETER
Oh, fuck me.

(He lays out the pieces.)

(Pulls out his phone. No texts or messages.)

(Resumes construction. Finds a special wrench in the hardware pile. Gets two long pieces together. Proud of himself.)

PETER
Fuck you, mother fucker. I will own you.

(Tries the next step. But has trouble deciphering the instructions.)

PETER
I hate these fucking cartoons. Why don't you use words? Words, words, words. Even Swedish words, I don't fucking care. Okay. Calm. Deep breath.

(Tries to attach a few pieces, but they don't seem to fit right.)

PETER
Come on. Get on there.

(Tries again. This piece doesn't fit either. Tries to force it but can't.)

PETER
Come on, come on, come on. Ow. Fucker. Crap fuck shit.

(Looks back at the instructions.)

PETER
What the fuck?

(Attaches something but it doesn't look

right. Definitely not right. Could be a disaster.)

PETER

Son of a motherfucking bitch. I will fucking wreck you lousy piece of shit.

(He's about to smash the whole thing to bits, but stops suddenly as:)

(Diane enters, with more chocolates.)

DIANE

How's it coming?

PETER

Fine. Getting started.

DIANE

Shoulder's okay?

PETER

Hardly even feel it.

DIANE

I brought more for when you're ready for a break.

PETER

You're awfully kind. (*looks at the mess of furniture*) I might need to take a little break right now.

DIANE

Crystallized orange in a chocolate/toffee blend.

(Peter tries one.)

PETER

Mrs. Robinson, I think you're trying to seduce me.

DIANE

I'm sure there will be some you don't like.

PETER

I find that highly unlikely.

DIANE

I don't want to distract you.

PETER

I'm afraid you are very distracting. And so are the chocolates. I'll save them as a reward. (*beat*) You're not like most of the people we work for.

DIANE

No?

PETER

They don't smile at us, not like you do.

DIANE

I didn't think I was doing anything unusual.

PETER

That's the thing, isn't it? To be exquisite, without any self-consciousness. That's what's special. It's like you wouldn't even recognize yourself if you looked in a mirror.

DIANE

Oh. I don't know about that.

PETER

You're extraordinary. I'm sure you hear that a lot.

DIANE

Just about the chocolates.

PETER

Then people aren't paying attention.

DIANE

But you are?

PETER

It would seem unavoidable.

DIANE

You're not the typical handyman.

PETER

That is true. I am not.

DIANE

Okay.

PETER

And my skills extend beyond assembling bookcases in the living room. My manual dexterity can be put to good use in other rooms, too.

DIANE

I see.

PETER

For example, the bedroom.

DIANE

Oh, my god.

PETER

Sometimes two people meet and they just need to put aside work and worries and seize the moment.

DIANE

Wow. You really just said all that.

PETER

And I meant it. I think you're beautiful.

DIANE

And that means you think we should...

PETER

Exactly.

(Diane starts laughing. And can't stop. Peter deflates a little with each burst of Diane's hysterical laughter.)

DIANE

Oh, my God. You really said.

(She dissolves into laughter again.)

DIANE

"My manual dexterity." Oh. Oh. Oh.

(She tries to catch her breath.)

DIANE

It's okay. I'm okay.

(Looks at him standing there, and starts laughing all over again.)

DIANE

"For example, in the bedroom." Oh, you are trying to seduce me, Mr. Mecklenberg. Look at you. Look at you.

PETER

Please stop.

DIANE

I'm trying. Really. Oh. Oh, my God. That is. That is. Where did you get all that? What have you been watching? Were you expecting me to come out here smeared with chocolate for you to lick off?

PETER

No.

DIANE

Oh, you. You. You are priceless. Oh, my god.

PETER

I take it that's a no.

(She suddenly stops laughing.)

DIANE

You are correct. That is a no.

PETER

Then I'll just get back to.

DIANE

No, you will not. You will gather your tools and get the fuck out of my house. I hired you to assemble some furniture, not for you to live out some porno fantasy. I allow you into my house, I offer you food, sympathy even, and you offer to fuck me.

PETER

I'm sorry, I--

DIANE

Yes, you are a sorry little boy who has no fucking clue about anything. Come on, get going. I don't have time for your bullshit, as amusing as you might be. And I don't want you lingering for one more minute, fantasizing about the two of us in compromising positions. Go on. Tools in your bag.

(Peter quickly gathers his tools.)

PETER

I didn't mean to--

DIANE

You blew it. Okay. Because I did think you were kind of cute. But. Oh, you little, little boy. Get out.

PETER

I'm going.

(She pushes him out the door.)

PETER

Don't push me.

DIANE

Get out.

(He's out, and she closes the door behind him and locks it.)

(End of scene.)

SCENE 4 NORDEN

(Later that day.)

(Another living room. Very spare.)

(Peter admires a newly assembled IKEA sideboard.)

PETER

Fuck you, you lousy piece of shit. Who says Peter Mecklenberg is not handy?

(Zander enters. He's a white businessman, on the phone.)

PETER

Hey.

(Zander holds up a finger. "Wait." Continues listening to the phone.)

PETER

I'm sorry it took so long, but--

(Zander holds up his finger more emphatically. "Quiet." Exits.)

PETER

Asshole.

(Peter waits impatiently. Gathers his tools.)

(Zander wanders back in, still on the phone.)

PETER

I'm finished.

(Zander points to the phone.)

(Peter hands Zander a form.)

PETER

Just sign this.

(Zander signs and signals for Peter to leave. Zander wanders off again. Peter picks up a pen or paperweight, then exits with his tools.)

(End of Scene.)

SCENE 5 BJURSTA

(Later that day.)

(Another living room. Slightly in disarray with medical and craft supplies. A pile of IKEA boxes on the floor.)

(The doorbell rings.)

(Nothing happens.)

(Doorbell rings again.)

(Elizabeth enters, moving a bit slowly. She wears a robe and her hair is covered by a bandanna. She might use a cane.)

ELIZABETH

Jesus Christ, keep your pants on. I'm coming.

(She opens the door to reveal Peter, stuffing his sling into his pocket. His tool bag is at his feet.)

ELIZABETH

Who are you?

PETER

Hi. I'm Peter, from Chore Monkey. I'm here to put your furniture together.

ELIZABETH

Oh. Right. Come in.

(Peter enters and she closes the door behind him.)

ELIZABETH

Jamie must have set that up. That fucking box has been there for a week, and I keep tripping over it. Sorry. I never used to swear, but chemo is a motherfucker.

PETER

Would it make you feel better if I swear a lot, too?

ELIZABETH

Nice of you to offer, but no. I'd think less of you. I'm greedy about the rudeness of it.

PETER

I'll endeavor to keep my act clean

ELIZABETH

I'd rather be in my garden, instead of cooped up in

here. But the stairs take so much out of me. Mrs. Han has taken over for me, but the Chinese don't have a feel for tomatoes. Shame, because I'm growing some amazing Purple Cherokees, but you have to pick them at exactly the right moment. Too early and they're too tart, too late and they crack. I'm boring you. You're here to do a job, and I sound like an old lady who's lost her marbles. Though, with all the chemicals in my body, that's probably true. When we look back at this era in medicine, we will cringe at the barbarity of chemotherapy. It's more like black magic than medicine. Shit. I sound like I'm eighty.

PETER

No, it's fine.

ELIZABETH

How old do you think I am?

PETER

I'm not good at that sort of--

ELIZABETH

How old?

PETER

Forty-five?

ELIZABETH

Oooh. You're a smart one. A pure sycophant would have said thirty-five. A sycophant is an ass-kisser.

PETER

I know what a sycophant is. Was I right?

ELIZABETH

It's pure vanity to avoid discussing one's age, but when you spend half your day throwing up and the other half just trying to get out of bed, the tiniest sliver of vanity is all I have left.

PETER

Are you sure this is a good time?

ELIZABETH

Time is short, and I need this put together. "Why would someone in your state of medical decrepitude buy new furniture?" you might ask. Other than a casket. Is a casket actually furniture? I can promise you that there is no IKEA equivalent, where you pay a lot less in exchange for mediocre quality and self-assembly.

PETER

Maybe there should be.

ELIZABETH

This is going to be my scrapbooking table. Quality time with nieces before it's too late.

PETER

That's nice.

ELIZABETH

I'm going to make some tea. I drink Darjeeling. With caffeine. Gotta have something to perk me up. But I have herbal varieties, for the faint hearted.

PETER

Darjeeling for me, too. Please. Um, before you go, can you sign this? It says that I'm here today to assemble a Bjursta table and a Vilgot swivel chair.

ELIZABETH

You know those IKEA names are just a perverted Swedish joke, right? Bjursta, Vilgot, Vlickledickleshickleschloss. There's a team of writers in Sweden laughing their asses off.

PETER

The minimum charge is for one hour, our rate is \$60/hour, and we're estimating 90 minutes of work time, including clean up. We can even haul away the empty boxes. If that all sounds good to you, just sign here.

ELIZABETH

You talk fast. Which could mean that you're untrustworthy, or else that you've said the exact same thing five hundred times.

(The doorbell rings.)

ELIZABETH

Who the fuck is that?

(She opens the door. Dante stands there, in his Chore Monkey shirt. His face is bruised and swollen and his arm is in a sling. The tool box sits by his feet.)

ELIZABETH

Who are you?

PETER

That's Dante. He's with me.

ELIZABETH

Oh?

PETER

He's. He's an apprentice. Assisting and observing. It's a Chore Monkey thing.

ELIZABETH

You didn't mention him.

PETER

We had a communications issue.

DANTE

Yeah.

ELIZABETH

People are not to be forgotten, not to be accidental. (to Dante) I assume you do not consider yourself to be an accidental person, though from the look of you, you've had some sort of accident.

DANTE

Kinda.

ELIZABETH

And loquacious, too. (to Peter) He's not going to slow you down is he? I'm paying by the hour.

PETER

It's always faster with an extra pair of hands.

ELIZABETH

Or hand, apparently. (to Dante) Do you want tea? I have Darjeeling and a bunch of pussy herbal varieties.

DANTE

I'm hungry.

ELIZABETH

I have some condolence tea cookies that someone brought, which seems oddly presumptuous. But people mean well.

DANTE

Thanks.

(Elizabeth exits to her kitchen.)

PETER

Where the fuck have you been?

DANTE

Hard day?

PETER

The first job today was a total clusterfuck. After that it took me three hours to assemble some fucking sideboard. Luckily the dude was on his phone the whole time and acted like I wasn't even there. I've been calling you. What the fuck?

DANTE

The cops came to my house.

PETER

Oh, no.

DANTE

They were looking for one of the souvenirs you took.

That silver lighter. That crazy bitch must have noticed when she got back from her trip.

PETER

Did they ask about her bong, too?

DANTE

No.

PETER

She's very selective in her relationship to crime. We purloined a lighter and a bong, but she has a stash of illegal drugs in her drawers. I can't believe she called the cops.

DANTE

I can't believe you took her shit.

PETER

It was a fair trade for the racist bullshit they were pulling.

DANTE

You are such a douche.

PETER

Me? I'm the one person who's on your side. Did the cops do that to you?

DANTE

Of course they did, dumbass. They knocked down my door. They must have yelled something, but I just heard the door crash open. You know my neighborhood.

PETER

You never know who might be knocking a door down.

DANTE

I grabbed a wrench and I'm lucky they didn't fucking shoot me. They were all: "hands in the air motherfucker. Down on the ground." They yanked my shoulder right out of the socket. Turned the whole place over, while I laid there on my belly. In handcuffs. The neighbors on the sidewalk, looking in. My landlord wondering what kind of shit I'm bringing into the house. Turned the whole place over, and I'm like, "What are you looking for, officers? What are you looking for?"

PETER

They wouldn't tell you?

DANTE

Not for a long time. Just "Where is it? Where the fuck is it? Where is it?" And I'm like, "Where is what?"

PETER

Mother fuckers.

DANTE

Finally, they've turned the whole place over. Doesn't take long. What have I got besides clothes, tools, and video games? And finally the cop leans over to me, and says, "You took a silver lighter from Cheri Long. Where is it?" And I keep saying, "I don't know. I don't know what you're talking about." I'm on the ground, and my shoulder is out of its fucking socket, and my arms are in handcuffs behind my back, and I swear I never had anything hurt that bad. "It's not me. It's not me. I don't have it. I don't have it." That's all I can say.

PETER

Wait. The pretty one called?

DANTE

I don't know. What the fuck difference does it make?

PETER

Did they take you in?

DANTE

Nah. I think they just got bored. Or figured out that I wasn't going to tell them. Or maybe that I didn't even have it. They just unlocked the cuffs and left. Didn't even close the door behind them. Left me there on the floor, with my shoulder all fucked up and the neighbors on the street watching me.

PETER

Assholes.

DANTE

The landlord called my dad.

PETER

Shit.

DANTE

They know each other. That's how I got the place so cheap.

PETER

Your dad.

DANTE

Looked like he'd rather just rip my arm off than take me to the hospital.

PETER

Your dad. That is not good.

DANTE

My whole life, he's been telling me: "Stay away from the police." "Do not be a knucklehead." "Do not call me from jail, son. Do not ask me to bail you out. Don't put me in that position. Do not do that to me."

PETER

They didn't take you in, though. Right? He's got to see that. You didn't call him from the station.

DANTE

I didn't call him at all. His friend had to call him, to say the cops broke down my door and who the fuck was going to pay for it and what the fuck was his punk ass son doing bringing the cops into the house.

PETER

For a fucking lighter.

(Dante opens up the tool box. He takes out the lighter and the bong and throws them at Peter.)

PETER

Hey!

DANTE

If they had looked in my truck, they would have found it. And then I *would* have had to call my dad from the station. All because of your fucking souvenirs.

(Elizabeth enters carrying a plate of cookies.)

ELIZABETH

The tea will still be another minute, but I found the cookies.

(Dante helps himself to a handful and eats them.)

DANTE

Thanks.

(Peter takes a single cookie.)

PETER

Thank you.

ELIZABETH

Everything all right in here?

PETER

Splendid.

ELIZABETH

Don't mind if I watch, do you? I don't have the energy to shuffle back and forth randomly.

(She sits in a chair or on the couch and waits for them to begin.)

(Dante and Peter look at each other.)

They're not used to working this way,
and there is a lot they still need to
say to each other.)

ELIZABETH

You're not like shy little girls are you?

DANTE

(to Peter) Go ahead. Show the apprentice how it's done.

(Peter gives Dante a look, and then
opens the largest box.)

ELIZABETH

He wanted to swear at you right then, but we agreed
that I'm the only one who gets to swear.

(Peter takes out the instructions and
puzzles over them.)

ELIZABETH

Because of the cancer. I'm playing the cancer card. You
could play the race card. Peter could... Well, I'm sure
he has cards to play.

DANTE

Sorry that you're sick.

ELIZABETH

Me, too. And I appreciate that your parents taught you
manners.

DANTE

Thanks. (to Peter) Done yet?

(Peter gives Dante the finger.)

DANTE

His parents did not teach him manners.

PETER

I'm playing the "child of divorce" card.

ELIZABETH

Won't win much with that.

DANTE

So, what have we got here? Bjursta extendable table?

PETER

I'm getting it. (offers him the plans) Do you want to
see?

DANTE

Could do this one in my sleep.

(Peter starts to rummage through the

wood and metal pieces.)

DANTE

Did you count the hardware? Always count the hardware.

PETER

It's all here.

DANTE

Good. Now, lay the two big pieces down. No, rotate them. Then lock them together with those clips.

(Peter follows Dante's instructions.)

PETER

These clips are really tight.

DANE

Don't push on the end. In the middle. Just like it says in the little cartoon. See?

ELIZABETH

You're the apprentice?

DANTE

I've assembled this kind of table before. (to Peter) Screw those brackets onto the long pieces.

ELIZABETH

My ex-husband was a good liar. You (*she points to Peter*) are a good liar. You (*pointing to Dante*) are hopeless and careless when it comes to lying. Do you feel that lying is beneath you?

DANTE

I'm not a fan.

ELIZABETH

It's what makes us human. We are the only animal that lies.

PETER

That's not true. Deception is used in nature all the time. The killdeer pretends to have a broken wing, the possum plays dead. Animals who are good liars are the ones who survive.

ELIZABETH

Young Peter is a student of deception.

DANTE

You don't believe in lying?

ELIZABETH

Right now I believe in anything and everything that gets me through the day. I believe in God, Jesus, Mohammad, ice cream, and Santa Claus. I believe in diet

and exercise. I believe in chemo. I definitely believe in medical marijuana.

So do I. PETER

I'll bet you do. ELIZABETH

I believe in getting the job done. Screw those brackets in. DANTE

I believe you're no fun. PETER

(Peter gets back to assembling the table.)

Those posts go in the inner holes, not the outer ones. Careful. DANTE

You've known each other for a long time. ELIZABETH

High school. PETER

Was he always like this? Nose to the grindstone. ELIZABETH

Oh, no. He used to be fun. PETER

He doesn't like being your apprentice. ELIZABETH

I don't work for him. He works for me. DANTE

But he doesn't like that. ELIZABETH

I don't care. PETER

Hm. ELIZABETH

(back to Dante) And you don't get to tell anyone that you're in charge. ELIZABETH

I don't care. DANTE

(The WHISTLE of the tea kettle from the next room.)

ELIZABETH

That's the tea.

(Dante uses his free hand to help her up from the chair/couch.)

ELIZABETH

Don't work too hard while I'm gone.

(Elizabeth exits to the kitchen.)

PETER

My mom was like that when she went through chemo. All she could talk about was cancer, cancer, cancer. Remember? You'd come over, and she'd be like, "Dante have something to eat, I'd eat but the chemo kills my appetite, blah, blah, blah, chemo, chemo, chemo." But now she's back to herself. And no one talks about it. We all pretend like it's not going to happen again.

DANTE

Why'd the cops come to my place?

PETER

You're the black one. That woman saw the two of us, saw something was missing, and she assumed. *Quel surprise.*

DANTE

Did the cops come to your mom's house, looking for the shit.

PETER

They wouldn't come to my place.

DANTE

Did the cops knock on your door, looking for the missing shit that you stole?

PETER

I'm not a thief. They were just souvenirs. Trinkets. It's not stealing. They were all things that would hardly be missed.

DANTE

What did you tell them?

PETER

Nothing.

DANTE

Did they search your house?

PETER

My mother's house? No. I did not let them in. The shit

was sitting in a box in my room. I had a bag and a pipe on the coffee table.

DANTE

They just stood on your doorstep and asked politely. And you politely declined. All a misunderstanding.

PETER

Basically.

DANTE

And you didn't text me. To warn me.

PETER

I didn't think.

DANTE

They broke down my fucking door, Pete.

PETER

I didn't know.

DANTE

They just about broke my shoulder. My landlord is all over my case. My dad. My dad. You should have warned me.

PETER

I thought it would all be fine.

DANTE

Fucking white boy. You sent them to me, didn't you? Needed to make sure they didn't look inside your room at all the shit you had stashed away.

PETER

Come on. We know each other better than that.

DANTE

I thought I did. But I'll tell you what I do know.

(Elizabeth enters with a tray with tea pot and cups. She's unsteady and Dante rushes to help her.)

ELIZABETH

When I said "don't work too hard while I'm gone," I was kidding. You haven't done squat.

(Peter gets back to work.)

PETER

I'm making progress.

ELIZABETH

(to Dante) I know you said you just wanted food, but I think you should drink tea with us. I brought you a

cup.

DANTE

Okay.

ELIZABETH

Sit. (to Peter) You don't mind if your apprentice has tea with us, do you?

DANTE

I told you--

ELIZABETH

I'm kidding. Lighten up. Drink a cup of tea.

(Dante sits with Elizabeth and they watch Peter assemble the table.)

ELIZABETH

What happened to your shoulder?

DANTE

Accident.

ELIZABETH

Accident or a mistake?

DANTE

Mistake.

ELIZABETH

That's how cancer is, you know. Cells making a mistake. They're fucked up, from mutation or chemicals or smoking or whatever, and they keep making their mistake over and over and over again. Until they kill you.

PETER

Not always. My mom had breast cancer, when I was thirteen. Had to do surgery and radiation and chemo and all that. She was miserable. There were days when she said she'd rather die. I was only thirteen, and I had to listen to her crying and retching. Suffering. It was terrible, but she made it through. You can't give up, you can't let it conquer you.

ELIZABETH

Oh, he's so very wise. A voice of experience, from a child. Did I ask for a pep talk? You don't know anything about me or my cancer. The fact that I'm dying is not because I lack the will to live. You do not have permission to blame me for my own death. Understand? So just have some tea and shut the fuck up.

(She pours Peter a cup of tea. They all drink tea together in silence. Not entirely comfortable silence. But they do have a moment.)

DANTE

(to Peter) I want my money.

PETER

What money?

DANTE

The money you owe me.

PETER

I've paid you for all the jobs so far. Once I get the next check from Chore Monkey, I'll give you your share. In cash. Just like always. And we shouldn't do this in front of Elizabeth. We were having a zen moment, with the tea.

ELIZABETH

I don't know if it was zen, but at least it was quiet.

DANTE

Once we got back from the hospital and my dad stopped wanting to kill me so bad, we had a chat.

PETER

His dad is serious business.

ELIZABETH

I imagine so.

PETER

You didn't tell him about my. Hobby? Did you?

DANTE

Your collecting hobby? I might have mentioned it.

PETER

You shouldn't have done that.

ELIZABETH

What do you collect?

PETER

Nothing.

ELIZABETH

Oh, I don't think so.

DANTE

He got real interested in what we'd been doing and how Chore Monkey worked.

PETER

He knows about the job. We've been at it for more than a year.

DANTE

He got curious about the fine print. Read the whole web

site.

PETER

All of it?

Because he knows that I have trouble reading. Especially all those complicated words, so small, so many of them all swimming around. He helped me, just like you were supposed to do, when we started this. You read all the details, you handled the e-mails and the texts. I knew I could count on you to help me, just like in high school.

PETER

You graduated because of me.

ELIZABETH

My son has a learning disability.

DANTE

I found a way to get around it.

PETER

I helped you.

DANTE

You fucked me over.

ELIZABETH

Maybe I should check in the kitchen and let you two--

DANTE

Stay. Otherwise things might get ugly.

PETER

No, she's right. Let's do this privately.

DANTE

This lady sitting here might be what keeps your ass alive for much longer.

PETER

Are you threatening me?

DANTE

You told me Chore Monkey takes twenty-five percent.

PETER

They did.

DANTE

That's right, when we first signed up. But it turns out they dropped it to twenty percent. A long time ago. But all the e-mails go through you. "I'll handle all that," you told me. You handled it all right.

ELIZABETH

Oh, that's shitty.

DANTE

Hundreds of jobs, and you took a couple extra dollars on each one. My dad helped me do the math. You owe me two thousand dollars.

ELIZABETH

Oh, my.

PETER

We can't do this now. Elizabeth, I apologize. This isn't professional. Dante, this is just a misunderstanding. A miscalculation. I made a mistake, but it was a

DANTE

Obfuscation. Right? That's one of your big words. You cheated me.

PETER

I'll. I'll. I'll.

DANTE

You'll pay me the money.

PETER

I don't have it.

DANTE

Find it.

PETER

It's not that easy.

DANTE

I don't care.

ELIZABETH

(to Peter) You do need to pay him back, you know.

PETER

Do I?

ELIZABETH

You fucked up. He caught you. You need to pay.

DANTE

Exactly.

PETER

Or else what? (to Dante) You call the cops? And show them our unwritten contract? Or show them all the jobs for which I was hired and paid by Chore Monkey. Not you. Me. I'm the one on record as having done the work. As far as they know, you hardly exist. You have done

five jobs. That's all you could get on your own. I, however, have done hundreds. Five star rating. You get cash from me, every week. Or do you? Prove it? Do you even have a bank account? Have you paid taxes on this income? What records do you possess that prove you even exist? Go to the cops. Look at what they did to you over a fucking cigarette lighter. Try to explain all this to them. What will they think when you turn up on their doorstep? Who will they believe? My story barely even needs to add up. It just needs to be enough to make them not care. Go ahead. Call them.

DANTE

You're a fucking lunatic.

ELIZABETH

Is this who you want to be?

PETER

No.

DANTE

But it's who you are.

PETER

I'm not. It. I'm sorry.

DANTE

Fuck you. I want my money.

ELIZABETH

Apologies are a first step. A tiny, little, baby, wussy step.

DANTE

He'd better do more than apologize.

ELIZABETH

(to Peter) Take out your wallet.

PETER

What?

ELIZABETH

Take out your wallet. Give it to him.

DANTE

I'm not touching that.

ELIZABETH

Give him all your cash.

(Peter does as instructed. It's not much.)

DANTE

Fifty-four dollars? You got nineteen hundred something

left to go, asshole.

ELIZABETH

You're smart, you have family, you know how to work the system. But you keep losing, every time. Did you steal from me?

PETER

Not yet.

ELIZABETH

Good. There's something. What about this (*points to Dante's shoulder*)? Did you do this?

PETER

I never touched him.

DANTE

You did it just the same, you fucking prick.

PETER

Dante. I am really, really sorry.

DANTE

Pay me back my money.

ELIZABETH

Dollar for a dollar, eye for an eye, shoulder for a shoulder.

PETER

And then?

ELIZABETH

Then maybe you won't believe you're such a piece of shit that you have to act like one. (beat) I'm going to go make another pot of tea. You two need to settle things before I get back.

(She exits.)

PETER

I messed up.

DANTE

Yeah.

PETER

You still want to kill me?

DANTE

I want you to stop fucking with me. I want everyone to stop fucking with me.

(Peter walks over to Dante and offers his arm.)

Go ahead. PETER

You think I won't. DANTE

I don't care. PETER

(Dante takes Peter's arm.)

Think you don't deserve it? DANTE

Does it matter? PETER

Do you deserve it? DANTE

Maybe. PETER

Say it! DANTE

Yes. Yes. I deserve it. Jesus fucking Christ, do it already. PETER

(Dante wrenches Peter's arm back, hard.)

How's that feel? DANTE

It hurts it hurts it hurts. PETER

(Dante pulls it back harder.)

I trusted you. You were supposed to be my friend. DANTE

(Dante pulls the arm back even more, Peter's in a lot pain now.)

I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. PETER

(Dante gives the arm a final yank.)

Aaaaah! PETER

(Dante releases Peter's arm. Peter's shoulder is messed up and he's in a LOT

Chore Monkeys
of pain.)

script sample 59.

DANTE
Now you're sorry.

PETER
Oh. Fuck. Fuck you. You hurt me. You really hurt me.
You really fucking hurt me.

DANTE
I'm sorry. I'm not like that.

PETER
You fucked up my arm, man. You really did.

DANTE
Maybe Elizabeth has some ice or something.

PETER
Just get out. You broke my fucking arm.

DANTE
I'm sorry. Pete. Look.

PETER
Get out.

(Dante gathers his tool box.)

DANTE
You're fired.

(Dante exits. Peter continues to writhe
in pain.)

(Elizabeth enters, carrying a fresh pot
of tea and more cookies.)

ELIZABETH
Where did he go?

PETER
He left.

ELIZABETH
Are you okay?

PETER
No. He really hurt me.

ELIZABETH
That sucks. But you had it coming.

PETER
Why are you so mean to me? Oh, right, I forgot. Cancer.
Cancer is license to do or say anything.

ELIZABETH
Maybe I'm not a very nice person.

PETER
I'm starting to see that.

ELIZABETH
Do you want some ice?

PETER
Please. God damn.

(Elizabeth exits.)

(Peter kicks at the tools and the junk scattered about. Sees the bong and lighter, picks them up.)

(Elizabeth enters, with two ice packs.)

ELIZABETH
These might help. Oh, what have you got there?

PETER
You know how you said you believed in medical marijuana?

ELIZABETH
I do.

PETER
Is that a theoretical belief, or a practical one?

ELIZABETH
Both.

PETER
Because I need something to take the edge off, right now. And I happen to have some of that particular painkiller with me.

ELIZABETH
Really?

PETER
And I would be willing to share.

ELIZABETH
That would be very kind of you.

PETER
I might be an asshole, but I'm not stingy.

ELIZABETH
I *am* feeling a bit peaked, with all this excitement.

(Peter sits on the couch and places the

bong and lighter on the coffee table.
And then takes a small plastic bag from
his pocket. She sits next to him and
pours the water from the tea kettle into
the bong. He packs the leaves into the
bowl, inserts it into the bong.)

PETER

It really hurts.

ELIZABETH

Yeah.

(Peter flicks on the lighter.)

(End of scene.)